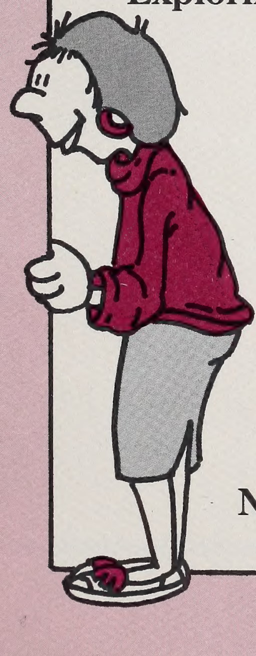
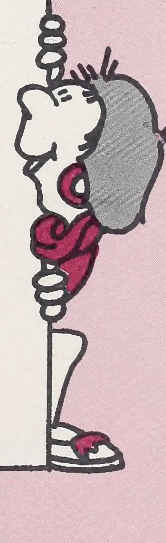
Community Survey Handbook

Exploring Community Views on Community Issues





Northern Alberta Development Council

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are pleased to present this handbook for use by northern residents.

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Introduction

So, you're interested in doing a community survey?

The Community Survey Handbook will show you how to find answers to your questions and identify solutions to your problems by leading you through the steps of a survey. In this handbook, doing a "community survey" does not necessarily mean using a questionnaire, although that is a very common approach. Survey here means "to examine" or "to take a look at". So, a community survey is actually looking at the views or issues of the community, using one or a combination of many possible approaches. The main approaches that we will deal with in this handbook include:

- Personal interviews
- Telephone interviews
- Mail questionnaires
- Group discussions

Many organizations are overwhelmed by the prospect of "conducting a survey". It *is* a major task and one not to be taken lightly. But, if you understand the survey process and take it step by step, you will see that it is a manageable activity. A survey can prove to be very beneficial for your group and provide you with much-needed information.

A survey can be used in a number of ways:[1]

- To develop long- and short-range plans
- To help define and solve problems
- To help set priorities
- To check if you are on track
- To find out public opinion
- To develop community support and stimulate action
- To find out new information

This handbook cannot cover everything involved in survey research. That could take volumes. But it will give you a good idea of what is involved in a survey and where you can go for other resources. There is also a *Technical "How-To" Guide* that is available and accompanies this handbook. It provides more detail on specific survey techniques, such as how to design a questionnaire and how to analyze the results.

In order to help make the survey process more understandable, we have created an imaginary situation to follow through each step. The imaginary situation involves Joy Smith, the chairman of the local recreation board, and we will follow her as she works with her board and her staff in making the recreation department more responsive to the needs of the community.

Because the handbook outlines the steps in a process, it is recommended that you read the book through to see the complete survey process. We have tried to keep the technical words to a minimum, but if you read a word you're not familiar with, you may find it in the "Terms and Definitions" section in Appendix C.

Good luck with your project and happy surveying!

Joy Smith had just moved to Northview to start a new job. Because she wanted to get involved in the community, she submitted her name for the chairman of the recreation board. To her surprise and delight, Joy was appointed to chair the six-member board. Joy discovered the recreation department had one part-time staffperson, Bob, who had been working there for several years. Bob was well-liked around town and involved volunteers in the delivery of recreation programs whenever he could.

At Joy's first board meeting, the discussion centered around the fall programs that were in the process of being planned. The Recreation Board had offered the same programming for the past five years and, during that time, the town had grown from 1400 to 2200 people. A new sawmill brought many young families to Northview for job opportunities. With the change in population and age, the board was concerned that the programs it offered might not be meeting the needs of the new community members. The decreasing number of registrants also supported this theory. How could they find out what people wanted? Should they conduct a community survey?

Before You Begin

Before You Begin

Before you decide to conduct a survey, the first question you might ask is: "Is a community survey the best possible way to find an answer to our question or a solution to our problem?"

A survey meets many needs but perhaps there is an easier or quicker method of solving your problem. Would a meeting with the mayor help? Or a letter to the local newspaper? Maybe an open line on the community radio talk show? Consider other options before determining that a community survey is your best approach.

The second question would be: "Do we really want to *know* the answers we get and are we prepared to *act* on them and carry them out?"

Joy had never been involved in a survey before. Although she knew it would take a big commitment, how else could the rec board find out if the recreation programs were meeting the need in the community? An open line talk show on the radio would let people express their opinions. But, only those listening and those interested would call. All of the people should be asked. What if the people said the recreation board was useless and didn't do anything? Well, thought Joy, if that's true, we should know it and try to improve.

Sometimes agencies or organizations already know what they would like to do, and then use a survey to support their ideas. Before you evenbegin planning a survey, think about what you would do if the answers you received weren't the answers you expected. How would you dealwith this? Some organizations have tried to bury the survey and its results. Your group must decide in advance if it will act on the survey results, regardless of the outcome.

Community surveys can be used to help you deal with five main areas of concern. Before you begin, check to see that what you want to know can be answered by a survey.

Use a survey when you want to know...[2]

1. **What people want**
   At the community level, that might be the kinds of programs different groups would like to see offered by the recreation department.
2. **What people's attitudes are**
   Here, the focus is on what people feel, such as how seniors might feel about going to a "senior drop-in centre" if one were available.

3. **What groups need services?**
   As communities and populations change, needs may change as well. This type of research can show if a specific group of people (perhaps young mothers) is not receiving services that it needs.
4. **Which alternatives would be most relevant?**
   This allows a group to priorize and determine the most effective alternative. For example, when faced with scarce resources, an agency may have to determine which services to fund and which might have to be discontinued.

Joy went to the library and read about surveys. It looked as though surveys were a good way to find out the wants, needs and attitudes of the public, and also which alternatives are best and what changes will make a program more effective. Since the recreation board needed to find out what the people of Northview would like in terms of recreation programs, a community survey might provide the answers.

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5. **What should be changed to make this program more effective?**
   Groups or agencies may want to evaluate their services and find out what should be changed or what is needed to improve the situation.

These five basic areas of research are not always clearly defined and sometimes overlap. A survey may draw on information from a combination of areas, like finding out what people want and their attitudes and which alternatives they prefer.

Any organization may want to undertake a community survey to gather information on its own service. However, community surveys can be flexible enough to obtain information for or about a number of organizations. In one northern community, a community survey was carried out that provided one page for each participating agency. This truly was a community survey about community agencies. Explore options. There is no one way or right way to do a survey.

Analyze the Situation

If you have decided that a community survey is the way you wish to go, the next step is to really analyze the situation. One way to do this is to ask yourselves a series of questions that will help you to sort out what you want to accomplish and the possible outcomes of your survey.

Who wants the survey done and how do they plan to use it?

Who else could be affected by the results?

Are any other factors contributing to the problem?

Do neighboring communities face the same issue?

Which community members care most about the issue now?

Who may be affected in the future if the problem is left unattended?

Has a similar study been done recently?

At the next meeting Joy brought the questions to her board and together they discussed them and compiled the answers.

1. **Who wants the survey done and how do they plan to use it?**
   The rec board wants the survey done to identify its programming needs for the fall.

2. **Who else could be affected by the results?**
   Ultimately, the citizens would be affected by the results. The Town Council would be, because it funds the programs and changes in programming could affect the budget. The Continuing Education Board might be interested in the results for planning and implementing its programming.

3. **Are any other factors contributing to the problem?**
   No.

4. **Do neighboring communities face the same issue?**
   Probably, because the new mill has brought in employees who have added to the population of the entire region.

5. **Which community members care about the issue now?**
   People who take courses through the recreation office care because programming affects them. People who want to take courses that aren't offered also care.

6. **Who may be affected in the future if the problem is left unattended?**
   All of the residents in Northview may be affected in the future if the programming does not reflect their needs.

7. **Has a similar study been done recently?**
   The recreation board has never carried out its own study.

Consult with Key Agencies and Individuals

A community survey does not operate in a vacuum. It impacts on and is important to many people. Identify those people who could be interested in your concern or your results and talk to them. Visit, phone, or send out a letter and ask for comments. Let them know what you are planning and get their input and, if possible, their assistance and support. If you're not sure whether or not a specific group should be consulted, consult them. Give them the opportunity to participate. The credibility and support for the project can quickly be lost if someone opposes your project because they were not asked to be involved.

A community survey has a good chance of being successfully completed if there is overall community support for the project.

If you are a non-profit society or receive funding from another agency, you may have to obtain formal support from your sponsor—especially if your sponsor may be contributing to the costs of conducting the survey.

However, you also want broad community support from:

- High profile, credible individuals who will visibly and vocally support the concept and study
- The public, who will be answering your questions, will be affected by the results and who will expect follow-up
- Other agencies who may want to provide assistance and use the results
- Local government departments and funding agencies
- The media, who can keep the community informed by sharing information.

It was clear from the questions Joy and her board discussed that many people would be interested in and affected by the fall programs. Joy contacted Continuing Education, as well as the adult education facility, to find out if they experienced the same programming concerns. She also approached the Family and Community Support Services (FCSS) director and town office for their views. At the regional recreation meeting Joy discussed the survey idea with the directors and chairpersons of recreation boards in neighboring communities.

She certainly felt she gained much valuable information and support for her project.

Joy's board made a list of other individuals who could provide support: the mayor, the editor of the local paper, and a retired school superintendent who sat on the continuing education board. After she met with all three of them, they each said they would help as much as possible.

Establish a Working Committee

When you decide to carry out a community survey, there are many decisions to be made and tasks to be accomplished. Even though your whole organization supports the project, the group as a whole may prove too unwieldy to actually carry out the project. Also, your organization does have other activities that will continue regardless of the project. Experience has shown that an appointed smaller "working committee" or "task group" tends to be more efficient in handling the project. These individuals should be given the responsibility and authority to make decisions regarding the survey, while providing reports and feedback to the main group.

The working committee should be made up of individuals who are genuinely interested in carrying out the survey and understand and agree to the time commitment. Try to select individuals with training or insight into the steps, as well as people who initiate and carry out ideas, events and programs. Ideally, the working group should be made up of six to eight people.

The people you select may be the critical element in the success of your project. As you consider individuals to approach, ask these questions and review these points: [3]

- What knowledge and skill will they bring to the group?
- Can they work well with other members? How compatible is their work style?
- Will they have the time? Will they be able to meet deadlines?
- Consider a mix of people that reflects the characteristics of your survey population—for example, their position with the organization, education, etc.

Invite the participation of representatives from other stakeholders in the community that you have already identified:

- Other agencies who may want to gather similar information
- General public who may be affected, including the silent majority
- Media
- Others from outside the region, such as business development representatives and planning commission members
- Don't forget about the private sector. The chamber of commerce, business associates and major employers can provide another perspective and can be a valuable addition to a committee.

The chairperson of the working committee has a key role—that of manager, motivator and arbitrator. The chairperson must keep in touch with the key people and have them provide regular reports. Each committee member must be kept informed of the progress changes and problems of the other members. Committee members should be encouraged to report problems when they need help. Because your project may span many weeks and even months, expect personnel changes as a result of job transfers, illnesses and the like. The chairperson should be prepared to fill vacancies when they occur.

There is no one way to select a chairperson. This will probably be the first major decision of the working committee!

With the establishment of the working committee, you are now almost ready to act!

The rec board discussed possible committee members. Joy approached each person and most were keen to get involved. A working committee of eight members was formed:

- ***Joy - recreation board chairperson***
- ***Mark - rec board member, power lineman***
- ***Karen - rec board member, local business person***
- ***Bill - retired school superintendent, representing Continuing Education Board***
- ***Sally - town employee, interested in study and experienced with surveying***
- ***Kris - FCSS chairperson***
- ***Don - FCSS board member, employed in local retail outlet***
- ***Ken - employee relations officer at the sawmill***

Joy was thrilled! The working group members were all committed and dedicated to the project and they were all "doers". Joy contacted them and set a date for the first meeting. This would be fun!

Summarize the Issue and Purpose

Before you take action, you may have one more step. Depending on your working group and the variety of its members, you may still need to spend some time providing and reviewing background information so everyone is at the same level. Ensure each member understands and agrees to the problem, the issues, the goals and the purposes of the group and the role of the committee.

You may also want to formally review the above goals and purposes with others: the original group, other boards and organizations, and the community-at-large. This would aid your working group in gaining additional support and participation, as well as getting valuable feedback on any factors that you may have overlooked. You may even want to hold a public meeting to talk about your purpose and objectives and discuss the importance and value of initiating a community survey. The following work sheet can assist you.

Issue Summary

The following questions will help to clarify and summarize the issues. You may also want to refer to the discussion questions of the original group in "Analyze the Situation" found on page 3.

The issue is: ....

....

The background to the problem is:

....

What we need to learn from this survey is:

(a) ....

(b) ....

(c) ....

The groups who may want to use the survey results are:

(a) ....

(b) ....

(c) ....

The groups or individuals who will be affected by the survey results are:

(a) ....

(b) ....

(c) ....

The purpose of the survey is to:

....

....

Joy opened the initial meeting of the working committee. After introductions, the first decision was to select a chairperson. All agreed Joy would be the one for the job.

Next, they reviewed and summarized the issue and purpose and eventually reached an agreement. A number of concerns were raised, such as how the information would be used and the issue of confidentiality. Joy reviewed the process of the project and the tasks. She asked that anyone who did not feel able to carry out the responsibilities because of time or personal commitments to say so now before the project got started. After some discussion, all agreed they could and would commit to the project.

The first meeting gave everyone a chance to get to know each other and establish a working relationship.

Joy shared some basic survey information she had located at the library and asked everyone to review the package for their next meeting, which was set for the following week.

The Plan

SECTION 2

The Plan

The planning phase of a survey project is critical. With thorough and thoughtful planning, your working committee will have a better idea of what to expect and will receive the least amount of surprises.

There are two main questions that you will need to ask in the planning phase:

1. "What resources will we need and what community resources are available?"
2. "What are the survey options and which is the best option for us?"

As you answer these questions on resources and survey approaches, be sure to keep your community involved.

Encourage Community Involvement

Throughout the project, it is important to share information and communicate at every step. Tell people:

- What you did
- What you are doing
- What you are going to do

And once you've done that, do it again! You can never have too much community involvement and support.

Community involvement is critical to the success of your project. If the general public sees you as listening, they will be more likely to participate. Tell them how you will use their ideas and consider their comments.

Public awareness and community involvement can also help to raise the profile of your organization or agency. That can have long-term payoffs.

Involving the public has many benefits:[4]

- The public wants the opportunity to have input into decisions affecting their lives
- People in the community know what needs and goals are best for themselves
- People have many ideas, viewpoints and experiences to share

Perhaps you've had negative experiences with "the public". For example, you held a public meeting and only two people showed up. There may be valid reasons for this: [5]

- The people didn't completely understand the project, why they should get involved or how it would affect them.
- They may think no one will listen to them, anyway, so why bother.
- There may be a fear of involvement or time commitment.

- The words used—such as "community profile" or "master plan" may scare people away.
- The meeting may have been timed poorly or conflicted with another meeting.
- Some people may feel that those in charge are doing a good job and thus they are complacent.
- A public meeting may not be the right medium to deal with the issue.

The working committee will want to continually refer back to the community for its opinions and views throughout each stage to establish accountability:

- During the identification of needs and goals
- During the information collecting
- During the discussion of recommendations and the evaluation of possible directions
- At acceptance of the final plan

Make a real effort to ensure community participation. However, there will be *varying levels* of interest and involvement. Recognize that not everyone wants to participate.

One way to increase community participation is through publicity. Publicity of your project increases interest and leads to more involvement. Although this will be discussed in more detail under "Maintain Public Support" on page 34, you can publicize in the early stages of your project by sharing information on your working committee, initial plans, and so on. A variety of advertising approaches can be used:

- Newspaper articles and editorials
- Posters and flyers describing the project
- Radio announcements
- Contact with other groups in the area, such as churches, PTA and agencies.

Identify Your Resources

There are two major areas that need to be assessed in order to help you make the final planning decision: community resources and survey options. These two areas work together—the community resources available will affect the survey option that you choose and also the survey option that may be most suitable for your project affects your resources. Although your group will assess each area separately, the final approach will take both the options and the resources into consideration.

To carry out a survey of community priorities, you will need a number of resources. Identify what local resources are available to you from a variety of sources such as schools, government offices and major employers.

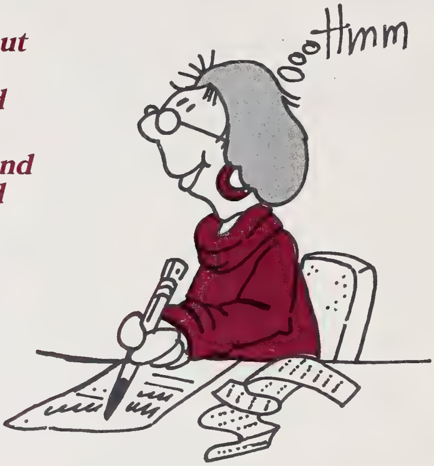
Human Resources
- Clerical assistance
- Survey designers/ interviewers/coders
- Survey coordinators/ supervisors/trainers
- Local expertise, advisers

Services
- Work area
- Photocopier
- Typewriter
- Telephone
- Paper, envelopes
- Stamps

Financial resources
- Funds available
- Potential sources of funds

Estimating the costs of a project is difficult. The cost will depend on a number of factors. Specifics can't be provided because the expenses of letterhead, stamps and photocopying always vary. Drafting a sample budget will provide you with a good indication of what expenses you can expect.

Before the next meeting, Joy reviewed the survey information. She was concerned about the budget and how the expenses could be covered. To get an idea of photocopying and postage costs, Joy drafted a rough sample budget. [6] ***She did not include the cost of bond paper or letterhead, as the Rec Board could supply that.***



Northview Community Survey
Sample Questionnaire Budget

Paper Materials

Questionnaire (6 pages @ .10/ea. = .60/copy)		
1000 copies - first delivery	*$ 600.00*	
Letters		
1000 copies of cover letter @ .10/each	*100.00*	
1000 copies of first follow-up @ .10/each	*100.00*	
Envelopes		
1000 - 11″ × 14″ brown for initial delivery @ .08/each	*80.00*	
1000 - 9″ × 12″ brown return envelopes enclosed in initial delivery	*60.00*	
1000 - white envelopes for first follow-up	*30.00*	
		$ 970.00

Postage

Questionnaire - 1000 × .74	*$ 740.00*	
First follow-up - 1000 @ .38	*380.00*	
Return postage - estimate 600 @ .38 for 60% response rate	*228.00*	
		$ 1,348.00

Final Report

Report (10 pages @ .10/ea. = 1.00/copy) — 100 copies	*$100.00*	
Distribution: 50 × .74	*37.00*	
		$ 137.00
	Total:	*$ 2,455.00*

Time
Although time is not a "resource" as such, it certainly influences your plan. Are you on a strict time line that cannot be altered or do you have a flexible, open time line?

The working committee identified their resources.

Human resources -
Bob (rec assistant) - time
Sally - expertise
Seniors - put forms together

Services -
FCSS - work area, desk, telephone (local calls)
Town office - photocopying
Sawmill - typewriter

Financial resources -
Rec board - perhaps access some funds

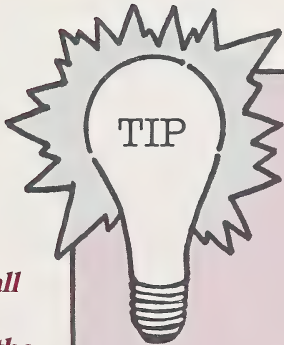
Time -
Results need to be available by May so fall programs can be planned.

Joy brought up the importance of keeping the community involved and aware. Bill volunteered to be the official public relations officer and share the information with local media.

In your timing, you will want to ensure the group you are trying to reach is available. When you schedule your survey, you may want to consider community or seasonal commitments such as:

- The Christmas season
- Easter
- Summer holidays or spring break
- Seeding time or harvest time

Setting timelines is discussed in more detail in Chapter 3.



Seniors are an excellent source of assistance, who can provide expertise, experience and manpower.

Choose Your Survey Approach

There are two basic ways of collecting information:

- Asking people questions
- Reviewing existing material

Because this handbook is talking about a 'community' survey, the interest is in finding out the views of the people—by asking them questions. Reviewing existing material is important and should be done as part of the survey process. It will be discussed at the end of this section.

There are four major methods which can be used to ask people for information. These methods can be used either alone or in a combination:

- Personal interviews
- Telephone interviews
- Mail questionnaires
- Group discussions
  - focus groups
  - public meetings

In the discussion of these methods, the advantages and disadvantages of each will be noted. As you review them, keep in mind the resources you have already identified. You should also be aware of the "response rates" of each method. The response rate is the percentage of people who answered your survey. The following calculation provides you with your rate response:

$$\frac{\textit{Number who answered the survey}}{\text{Number asked to answer the survey}} \times 100 = \text{percent or “rate of response”}$$

Each survey method provides different rates of response. Some estimates are noted below:

Personal interviews
- about 80%

Telephone interviews
- about 60%

Mail questionnaires
- about 25-30% if no incentive is provided and no follow-up takes place

A mail questionnaire response rate can range from a low of 7% for a long, tedious questionnaire to up to 40% when incentives are offered and/or follow-up takes place.

Personal Interviews

In a personal interview, an interviewer meets with a person in a one-on-one discussion and asks a series of prepared questions.

Most of us have experienced a face-to-face interview, for example, census information and voter registration.

Benefits

- People tend to speak more freely in a personal interview.
- The interviewer can see when people are hesitating and encourage them or "probe".

- Complex questions can be asked as the interviewer can explain them.
- Reading problems do not prevent people from understanding the questions.
- Most people are impressed with the trouble the interviewer has taken to find and meet with them; as a result, they are usually polite and helpful.
- The interviewer can obtain information on the characteristics of people who don t respond and the reasons for their refusal.

Drawbacks

- Travel between interviews is time-consuming.
- It is the most expensive method and fewer people can be contacted.
- Finding people to carry out interviews may be a challenge. Interviewers need listening, writing and speaking skills as well as training in interview techniques. They need a personal manner that conveys understanding, patience, and respect for the privacy of others.
- The recruitment and training of interviewers is time-consuming and costly.
- The answers are difficult to analyze if responses are detailed.
- Interviews and styles may not be consistent among different interviewers, resulting in varied responses.
- People may not want to speak openly to someone they know, especially if it is a sensitive or controversial issue.
- Scheduling of interviews may be difficult and require much evening work.

With the available resources in mind, Joy and her committee reviewed the survey options.

Personal interviews—Although this would provide the most thorough results, the interviewers and coders would take time to train and time to carry out the interviews. Because the rec board needed the results for fall planning, they didn't have a lot of time. Also, the respondents might want to be anonymous if they had critisms of the rec board and its courses.

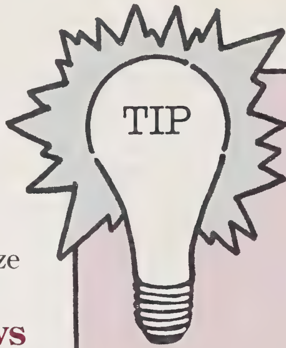
See "How to..."
Do Personal Interviewing
in The Technical Guide

Requirements:
- Trained survey designers, interviewers, coders *or* the time to train them
- Local expertise, advisers
- Photocopier, typewriter
- Time to conduct and analyze interviews

Telephone Interviews

In telephone interviews, trained interviewers ask respondents a set of questions over the telephone and record their responses.

Benefits
- A high percentage of those asked to participate do respond. People are more willing to be part of a telephone interview than a mail questionnaire.
- People will give more detailed answers over the telephone than they will on a mail questionnaire.
- Reading problems do not interfere with people s ability to understand questions.
- More people can be reached in a given amount of time with telephone interviews than with personal interviews.



Studies have shown that it takes 2 to 4 calls to complete one telephone interview. Plan accordingly!

- Telephone interviewers are easier to select and training is shorter. Also, interviewers can be supervised.

Drawbacks
- It can be difficult to catch people near their telephones.
- Survey must be short (5 to 10 minutes) or respondent will not reply.
- Questions must be kept short and uncomplicated; it is difficult to have multiple choice questions.
- Costs of long-distance calls add up if the interviewer calls from outside the toll-free area of the people being interviewed.

Telephone interviews—As with personal interviews, the time factor for training and interviewing would be too tight for the committee.

Also, many of the people out of town have party lines or no phones. This approach would provide a higher response rate, though.

See "How to..."
Do Telephone Interviewing
in The Technical Guide

- Background noises and interruptions can cause problems.
- The survey misses people who have no phone, unlisted phone numbers or who are unwilling to answer the questions on a party line.

Requirements

- Trained survey designers, interviewers, coders *or* the time to train them
- Local expertise, advisors
- Photocopier, typewriter, telephones
- Time to conduct and analyze interviews

Mail Questionnaires

In a mail questionnaire, a series of questions are listed on a form. The respondent is asked to complete the form and send it back. Questionnaires may be delivered or mailed to the respondents and then they may be picked up, mailed back or dropped off at a convenient location.

Mail questionnaires—Since the questions the working committee wanted to ask were not complicated, mail forms would be all right. It would take less time. The answers would be anonymous. But because some people don't read, the mail-out could be combined with another approach.

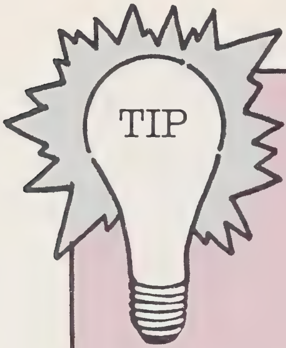
Benefits

- Wider distribution is possible.
- Because the respondent stays anonymous, there may be greater honesty and personal questions are more likely to be answered.
- People can complete the questionnaire at a time that is convenient for them.
- Respondent can consult with other members of the household if expected to answer for them.
- No interviewer time is involved.

Drawbacks

- The response rate is low—many people will not complete and return a mail questionnaire.
- Interpretation of the questions is left up to the respondent.
- The questionnaire must be short and the questions must be very clear and very simple.
- The reading levels of respondents may be a problem.
- People do not always read questions carefully, answer questions completely, or answer *all* the questions on a mail questionnaire.

See "How to..."
Do Mail Questionnaire
in The Technical Guide



To increase response to a mail questionnaire:

- Follow-up with a phone call
- Offer to pick up the form
- Give a small prize to those who return the form, or enter their name in a draw.

- There is no control over who completes the form.
- Postage and envelope costs need to be included in the budget.
- It may be difficult to obtain a current mailing list.
- Time must be allowed to receive back all of the completed questionnaires.

Requirements

- Trained survey designers and coders or the time to train them
- Local expertise, advisers
- Photocopier, typewriter
- Time to mail out questionnaires, receive them back and analyze responses

Group Discussions

People can provide information in a group through a discussion process. There are two effective methods that can be used:

- Public meeting
- Focus group

Both of these approaches involve getting a number of people together, usually with varied backgrounds. In a public meeting, of course, anyone is welcome. In a focus group, however, you can limit who is invited—by number or by background.

Most people are familiar with the public meeting process. Public meetings are open to all those affected by the issue. It is an opportunity to both give and receive information, to discuss issues and, possibly, to reach an agreement. This is a more informal way of gathering information and is analyzed by recording and examining the content of the discussions.

A focus group is a method which helps a group of people analyze a problem by focusing on one specific question or problem. It brings together a varied group of people and encourages different opinions to emerge. A focus group looks at all sides of an issue. The overall issue is clearly worded as a question or problem and serves as the “focus” of the discussion.

In a focus group six to 12 people are interviewed together. A trained interviewer directs the questioning and discussion so that all group members have a chance to speak. A focus group discussion is expected to provide a wide variety of points of view on an issue. The group is not expected to reach any agreement or conclusion.

The benefits and drawbacks of both approaches are similar.

Benefits

- The opportunity is provided for one person's ideas to build on another's.
- It is possible to see what the balance of opinion is on a number of options.
- Objective decisions can be arrived at on various issues, particularly through the ranking procedure in focus groups.
- The group setting provides a chance to hear other points of view different from one's own; opinions can be changed and formed.
- The process generates information and suggests solutions.
- People may be motivated to take action on an issue as a result of a group discussion.

Drawbacks

- People who are seen to be in positions of power may influence what others say.
- A trained interviewer is needed to lead the focus group and an experienced person must chair a public meeting, so that everyone has the opportunity to speak to each point.
- Group discussions do not allow for people to give independent answers to specific questions to the extent that they can when they are asked to answer questions privately. The variety of answers that people might give in answering questions is the main thing that is learned from these discussions.
- Attendance at public meetings is usually low—except where a threat is perceived.
- Caution must be used in suggesting that the answers are representative of the entire population, as those people with a lot to lose or gain will tend to be over-represented.

Group discussions—Joy and the working committee seriously considered a group discussion approach, but finally decided against it because the rec board wanted opinions from many people—not just those who might attend a public meeting or are invited to a focus group.

See "How to..."
Do Group Discussions
in The Technical Guide

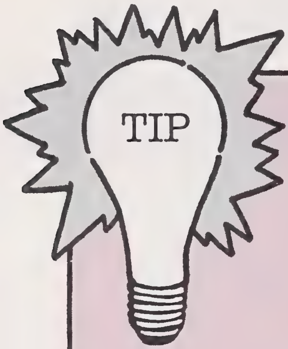
Summary of Advantages and Disadvantages of Four Survey Approaches

Approach	Advantages	Disadvantages
1. **Personal Interview**	• speak more freely • interviewer can probe • interviewer can explain complex questions • reading difficulties are not a problem • respondents are generally helpful • interviewers can get information on non-respondents and reasons for their lack of response	• expensive • travel between interviews is time consuming • recruitment and training of interviewers is time consuming and costly • may be awkward to ask questions on sensitive issues • answers are difficult to analyze • interviewers may not be consistent
2. **Telephone Interview**	• high response rate • quick, as more people can be reached in a given time period • interviewers are easier to select, training is shorter and they can be supervised	• survey must be short • questions must be short and simple • background noise and interruptions may cause problems • cannot reach those with no phones, unlisted numbers, unwilling to answer on party line
3. **Mail Questionnaire**	• low cost • wide distribution • less bias • allows anonymity and perhaps greater honesty • respondent can complete when convenient	• response rate is low • respondent interprets questions • questions must be clear and simple • reading levels may cause a problem • no control over who completes the form • takes time to receive all the questionnaires
4. **Group Discussions**	• can build on ideas • objective decisions can be reached • opportunity to hear other opinions • generates information • may motivate people to action	• people may be influenced by those in positions of power • experienced chairperson/leader necessary • attendance is usually low • those present do not usually represent the public

What Survey Method Will Suit Your Needs?

	Face-to-Face Interviews	Telephone Survey	Mailed Questionnaires	Group
1. Type of information [7]				
If you have				
• A complicated series of questions to ask	Yes	Possible	No	Yes
• Many open questions to ask	Yes	Possibly	No	Possibly
• Many alternatives to be considered or rated	Possibly	No	Yes	Yes
Do you need to know				
• Responses to very specific questions	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
• Deeper attitudes and feelings	Yes	Possibly	No	Yes
2. Collecting the Answers				
Do you need				
• Answers from specific people who are likely to respond	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
• Answers from a lot of people	No	Possibly	Yes	No
Do you have				
• People who have reading problems	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
• People who will not want anyone to know what they think	Possibly	No	Yes	No
• People who speak other languages	Possibly	Possibly	Possibly	Possibly
3. Time				
If you lack				
• Trained interviewers or the time to train people	No	No	Yes	Yes
• Time to code responses or people to do it for you	Possibly	Possibly	Possibly	Yes
• Time to think about the research you are doing	Never	Never	Never	Never

Note: The use of "possibly" indicates that special methods or expertise may have to be used to get accurate results.



Check your local library for books on how to run effective meetings!

Requirements
- Trained focus group leader or experienced chairperson
- Time to advertise meeting or invite participants
- Meeting room

Consultant Research

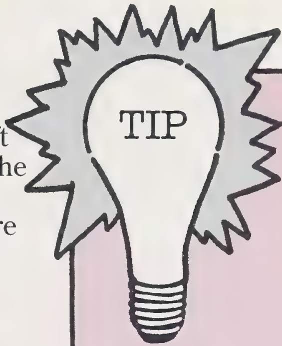
The purpose of this handbook is to outline the process of a community survey so that any community or group can have the information to carry out their own survey. However, there is always the option of hiring a consultant to help with parts of the survey or to carry out all of it.

Consultant Research—The rec board did not have a budget to hire a consultant. Also, survey expertise was available locally to review and advise throughout the process.

Benefits
- The time commitment of local volunteers will be much lower than in any other method.
- Some consultants have much expertise in survey design and a thorough knowledge of the survey steps.
- A consultant would have an objective and unbiased perspective of the local concern.
- The general public tends to pay more attention to a report if it is completed by an outside party.

Drawbacks
- It costs more to hire a consultant than any other survey option.
- The consultant may not thoroughly understand the community concern, which may result in a survey that doesn't address the issue.
- The community may not have a sense of owning the study if they were not involved in the survey design. They may not be committed to the results and conclusions and may not want to follow through on the study recommendations.

Requirements
- Financial resources
- Working committee to draft the terms of reference for the study, hire the consultant, direct the survey and ensure the results and graphs are clear and understandable
- May need local volunteers, depending on survey approach



Two excellent sources on hiring consultants are listed in the Appendix: "Hiring Consultants" and "Selecting and Working with Consultants".

The working committee reviewed the types of survey methods they could do. Each had advantages over the others. After much discussion, the committee decided to combine two approaches—the mail-out questionnaire and the personal visit. Volunteers would drop off the questionnaire at the randomly selected homes and make arrangements to pick them up at a specific time. If the respondent had questions, the volunteer would provide assistance. This way, there would be a higher response rate with accurate and complete forms.

Review Existing Information

One final step before you go ahead is to see what information is already available. Other organizations may have asked the same questions that you want answered. So before you reinvent the wheel, you may want to see what information has already been gathered. [8]

Government departments at the municipal, provincial and federal levels conduct studies and gather facts regularly. There are a few broad categories of records:

- Community information
- Studies and plans
- Census statistics
- Your agency records

Some of the working committee members were aware of research reports and studies that had been conducted in Northview over the years. These could provide invaluable information for the survey, either by providing answers to their questions or by providing questions that had already been developed. Don and Ken volunteered to gather the resources, review them and report back at the next meeting. Joy offered to contact the government departments to see what information they had on Northview.

It was a full meeting. Even though everyone was exhausted, they knew much had been accomplished. To allow time for everyone to gather information, another meeting was set in two weeks.

Joy handed out a form called "Summarize the Plan" (see page 29) and said that the next time the working committee got together, the form could be completed.

Much municipal data exists and can be searched for community information. The municipal office can tell you what is available.

Local organizations such as the school board, chamber of commerce, or historical society have information on other aspects of community life. Find out what other groups in the community have conducted research.

Many studies and plans have been done by government departments and planning commissions. The information is almost always available at little or no cost. Any provincial government department can be contacted for information on the community. For example, Alberta Economic Development and Trade produces "Alberta Locations", a government publication which is revised annually and provides individual factual profiles of many Alberta communities.

The federal government conducts a complete census every 10 years and a minor census at the five year mid-point. The last federal census was taken in 1986 so a minor census will be conducted in 1991. Information is available in the form of a "census profile" of your village, town, county,

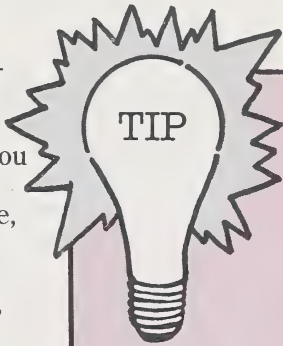
municipal district, or improvement district, which will give you information on many aspects of your community. You can find out, for instance, the total population divided by age, sex, ethnocultural origin and highest level of schooling. Occupations, average income, marital status, and types of dwellings are other facts gathered by the federal census and included in the census profile.

Your agency, as well as other community agencies, probably has material that could provide additional information. Reports, minutes, and annual reports would be useful to review for background and historical data.

Other communities have also conducted a number of studies. The Northern Alberta Development Council has copies of some of these reports and findings. See Appendix A for a listing of the community titles and the purpose of each report available at the NADC office.

Arrange a visit to your local library and see what information it can either provide or access. The library will know, for example, how to get copies of material from Statistics Canada.

Consulting the records and data already available will yield a wealth of information about your community.



The Alberta Bureau of Statistics maintains a resource library of Alberta studies. Call an information officer for reports on your community.

You may also want to consider the following points in your plan:

- Regular reports—Depending on the relationship of the working committee to the main group, you may want to provide regularly scheduled updates of activities. You may also want to keep the mayor and council informed of your progress.
- Record keeping—No matter what method of surveying is selected, accurate records are essential to success. Not only will you be able to follow your

At the next meeting, the working committee reviewed the documents available. Some were very helpful. Joy had contacted the Alberta Bureau of Statistics and had received census information on Northview. With information from the 1981 and 1986 censuses, the committee could compare the growth in Northview and the changes in family size, average age and education levels. The committee then Summarized the Plan .

Survey approach - combined mail and in person.

Resources available to the Committee:	Required:
clerical assistance – Bob	
survey design – Sally	*survey interviewers*
photocopier – town office	*survey coders*
work area, phone - FCSS	*stamps*
typewriter – sawmill	
letterhead, envelopes – rec board	

Documents available:

Census statistics
Recreation Master Plan
Tourism Action Plan

Timeline: *May*

steps, but you will also have hard evidence of what occurred.

- Budget—Your survey approach may not cost you a lot of money, especially if you plan on the effective use of volunteers. But, you would probably be surprised to know the value of your survey, considering the donations in kind and of volunteer time. Try to keep track of the hours your volunteers put in and any contributions of paper, mailing, office supplies and so on, from any organizations or groups. That will give you an overall estimate of the survey cost.
- Evaluation—Evaluation is not a post-event activity; it is a continual process that starts when the planning does. Continual evaluation notifies the committee members that their performance is important. The distance between what *is* and what *should be* indicates what additional resources are needed or what changes will have to be made. This ongoing assessment is not an imposition on people when they have selected and agreed on the objectives. [9]

As you review your plan, you may see that there are gaps between the resources you need and what is available. The working committee will have to decide whether to try to find that resource or to change the plan.

Summarize the Plan

After examining and discussing this section on planning a survey, your working committee should be able to complete the following list.

Survey approach selected: ______________________________

Resources available to the working committee:	**Resources needed:**
Human	
______________________	______________________
______________________	______________________
______________________	______________________
Services	
______________________	______________________
______________________	______________________
______________________	______________________
Financial	
______________________	______________________
______________________	______________________
Documents available	
1. ______________________	______________________
2. ______________________	______________________
3. ______________________	______________________

Timeline

Date when survey results are needed: ______________________

Implementation

Implementation

Well, you've done your groundwork. Now you're ready to implement your plan. There are four main activities that take place in the survey process:

Joy and the working committee reviewed the four main activities in implementing the survey: designing, administering, interpreting, and writing the report. After some discussion, it was clear that certain members of the committee had either expertise or an interest in specific activities. In order to make use of their skills and interests, Joy asked who would like to supervise or be responsible for certain activities. Sally wanted to design the questionnaire and Mark volunteered to look after sampling and help Sally in design. Ken was responsible for interpreting and Kris for writing the report. Joy and Bill volunteered to administer the survey with the help of Bob, the rec assistant.

The person responsible would then recruit others to help complete the tasks. Some committee members had friends and family to approach. The "volunteer list" maintained by FCSS also listed people who might be interested in getting involved. If it looked difficult to get the help that they needed, Joy said, additional strategies would have to be discussed.

- Designing the survey
- Administering the survey
- Interpreting the survey
- Writing the report

There are a number of ways to carry out these activities. Your working committee could:

- Appoint a survey coordinator to have overall responsibility
- Appoint a 'manager' for each of the four main activities
- Maintain responsibility within the working committee and delegate the tasks as they arise

In this section, we will discuss all the activities that need to take place during the implementation phase. In addition to the four main activities, choosing your sample, maintaining public support and keeping on track are also discussed.

See "How to..."
Carry out the Four Main Activities
in The Technical Guide

Choose Your Sample

With all your planning, consulting and discussing, you probably have a good idea of who should answer your questions. These people will make up your "population".

The population refers to all the people you are interested in. For example, your population might be all of the citizens in a community or all of the seniors aged 65 and over or all of the parents with pre-school aged children.

The word "sample" refers to the people within the population who are actually interviewed or surveyed.

The accuracy of the results you get from the sample is related to the sample size.

If you are not restricted by funding or time, or if your population is small, your sample may be the entire population. Usually, however, money and time are limited. Therefore, your sample will probably be a portion of the population.

The numbers suggested below will give you an idea of how large your sample should be to find out how the entire population thinks. These numbers will be a good indication *only* if you select the people to answer questions from a list in a consistent way *and if your questions have been* well-tested *and* if everyone who is asked to answer your questions cooperates.

Total Number in the Population	**Sample Size**
100 or fewer	all
101 to 300	2 out of every 3 people
301 to 500	every second person
501 to 1,000	every third person
over 1,000	370

The percentage of people who answered the questions as compared to the people who were asked gives you the response rate. (See page 16 for a discussion on response rates.) The key to being able to generalize your sample results to the population is having a high response rate. For example, if your population is 1500 people, according to the chart you would need to have a sample size of 370 people. If you ask all 370 people and 185 people answer, you have a 50% response rate. Let's say you want more people to answer your questions so you decide to ask more people. This time your sample size is 600 people and 252 people respond. Your response rate is now 42%. So, even though you have more answers (252 versus 185), the percentage of people who responded is lower (42% versus 50%).

The higher your response rate, the more confident you can be that the sample results resemble your population. So, it is recommended that you keep your sample size to the numbers noted in the chart but try to get a high number of them to respond. The survey method you choose can affect response rate. Personal interviews are generally higher (80%) than telephone interviews (60%) and mail questionnaires (25 - 30%).

The Northview Community Recreational Survey is concerned with whether the recreation programs are meeting the needs of the community. The population they must ask includes:

- ***Present participants in rec courses***
- ***Past participants in rec courses***
- ***Potential participants who may take rec courses***
- ***Other agencies offering courses such as continuing education, adult education, FCSS.***

Another factor in increasing the response rate is follow-up. It is better to follow-up twice on a sample of 370 people and get a response rate of 65% than to do no follow-up on a sample of 600 people and get a lower response rate. Throw your time, energy and resources into follow-up and increasing your response rate rather than trying to increase your sample size.

You may want to consider at this point the geographic area you are concerned with. Will you want to select your sample from those in the municipal boundaries, a ten-mile radius, or some other border? The boundaries you choose could greatly affect your survey results.

Maintain Public Support

Public support is critical to the success of your project. Since it's the public who will be answering your questions and providing your answers, make sure they are aware of your plans, goals and activities. Share information about:

- why the survey is being conducted
- how the results will be used

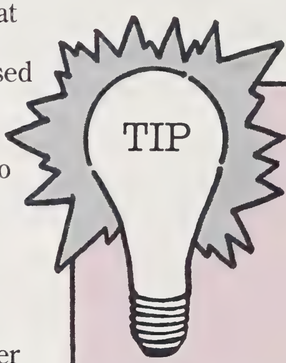
Public awareness helps by getting people mentally set to take part in the survey and by giving them background information.

It is important to have public support for your project so that the results of your survey are accepted as legitimate, unbiased and representative of public opinion.

There are a number of ways to build public awareness and support for your project:

- Provide lots of information
    - newsletters
    - formal letters
    - updates in the newspaper or on cable TV or radio
    - editorials
- Do some goodwill advertising on grocery bags
- Hold a public meeting and discuss the key issues
- Send a notice with the water bill or tax notice
- Obtain public support for the survey from high profile persons
- Present workshops which are open to survey participants and discuss the survey results

You may want to delegate the role of a public relations or information officer to someone on your working committee.



Use local media for expertise in drafting news releases and articles.

Design the Survey

- Develop survey questions and collect existing questions from those developed by others
- Edit and order the questions

See "How to…"
Design the Questionnaire
in The Technical Guide

- Compose the layout of the survey and the pre-coding
- Check to see that all general questions the survey is expected to find answers to have been addressed in one or more survey questions
- Write or arrange for cover letters and survey cover pages
- Circulate the draft survey to select individuals for their review and comment on any potential problems

See "How to…"
Pre-test
in The Technical Guide

- Supervise the pretesting and revision of the survey
- Supervise the photocopying of all survey forms and related information

Bill, being the public relations person for the Northview Community Survey, placed regular articles in the local paper. As they were getting into the implementation phase, Bill made mention of the need for volunteers in his newspaper article so the public could get involved. Three people called Bill and asked how they could help.

Administer the Survey

- Supervise any sampling and obtain all necessary mailing or telephone lists or local residential maps
- Recruit volunteers to assist in collecting information
- Arrange for a training session for telephone or personal interviewers

See "How to..."
Train the Interviewers
in The Technical Guide

- Supervise the interviewers, which includes discussing and keeping track of their progress
- Supervise mail-out of questionnaires (if applicable)
- Supervise the collection of all completed forms
- Follow-up to increase response rate

See "How to..."
Collect the Answers
in The Technical Guide

Keep on Track

As you can see, there are a number of tasks to be carried out in the implementation phase of your survey, particularly in the administration phase. It is easy to get lost in the process.

The key to keeping on track and progressing with your project is to outline your overall project timelines. You have already identified when you would like the survey results, but there are a lot of things to be accomplished by then. Map out the tasks and try to predict how much time you will need for each stage. This will allow everyone working on the survey to see when their contribution is needed. Talk to people who have been through a survey to try to get an idea of realistic timelines.

The following form outlines the tasks in the implementation phase. Complete it and distribute copies to your working committee. A blank form that outlines *all* of the major tasks in surveying from beginning to end is located in Appendix A [10]

See "How to..."
Set the Timelines
in The Technical Guide

Joy asked all committee members to look carefully at the tasks they were each responsible for and to estimate the time each task would require. At the next "get-together", all of the tasks and dates were discussed and charted. It looked like a May completion date was unrealistic and June would be more likely. Since everyone except Bob was a volunteer, the activities would be done mostly in their spare time. The committee felt comfortable with the timelines and all felt they could complete the project by June. Their final chart follows:

Northview Community Recreational Survey Project Timelines

Tasks	Calendar Dates Begin	Calendar Dates End	Person Responsible
Before You Begin			
Select committee members	Dec 6	Dec 31	Joy
The Plan: Jan. 1 - 31			
Summarize the issue	Jan 1	Jan 14	all
Identify resources	Jan 1	Jan 14	all
Review and choose survey approach	Jan 14	Jan 31	all
Review existing material	Jan 14	Jan 31	Don, Ken
Maintain public support	Throughout		Bill, all
Implementation: Feb. 1 - May 30			
Design the sample	Feb 1	Feb 25	Mark (Karen)
• Get lists, names	Feb 1	Feb 7	
• Get maps or other documents	Feb 1	Feb 7	
• Draw the sample	Feb 7	Feb 22	
• Assign interviewers	Feb 22	Feb 25	
Design the Questionnaire	Feb 1	March 12	Sally (Mark)
• Collect existing questions	Feb 1	Feb 14	
• Write new questions	Feb 1	Feb 14	
• Edit and order questions	Feb 15	Feb 16	
• Layout and pre-code	Feb 16	Feb 20	
• Circulate draft for comments	Feb 20	Feb 25	
• Pre-test interview/questionnaire	Feb 25	Feb 25	
• Revise	Feb 25	March 1	
• Pre-test	March 2	March 7	
• Repeat as often as necessary			
• Final type	March 10	March 11	
• Make copies and assemble	March 11	March 12	
Administer the Questionnaire	Feb 2	April 30	Bill (Don, Bob)
• Write introductory letter	Feb 2	Feb 7	
• Recruit and select volunteers	Feb 1	Feb 15	
• Train volunteers	Feb 16	Feb 28	
• Arrange time for interviews	Feb 24	March 12	
• Assign jobs to volunteers	March 7	March 12	
• Mail/deliver questionnaire	March 12	March 15	
• Interview	March 12	April 7	
• Follow-up on mail-out	April 7	April 7	
• Collect completed questionnaires	April 30	April 30	

Tasks	Calendar Dates Begin	End	Person Responsible
Interpret the Questionnaire	April 15	May 15	Ken, Sally
• Code	April 15	May 7	
• Sort and cross-sort	April 15	May 7	
• Tabulate	May 7	May 10	
• Draft results	May 10	May 14	
• Present results to committee	May 14	May 14	
Prepare report	May 15	June 7	Kris (Karen)
• Plan the report	May 15	May 16	
• Write the draft	May 16	May 21	
• Prepare graphs and charts	May 16	May 20	
• Type and edit draft	May 20	May 27	
• Present draft to key groups	May 28	June 7	
• Print final report	June 7	June 7	
Follow-up: June 7 - 30			
Mail/distribute the report	June 7	June 21	Bob
Share the information	June 7	June 21	Joy
Create an action plan	June 21	June 28	Bill
Evaluate	June 21	June 28	all
Show appreciation	June 30	June 30	all

Project Timelines

Tasks	Calendar Dates Begin	Calendar Dates End	Person Responsible
Implementation			
Design the sample			
• Get lists, names			
• Get maps or other documents			
• Draw the sample			
• Assign interviewers			
Design the Questionnaire			
• Collect existing questions			
• Write new questions			
• Edit and order questions			
• Layout and pre-code			
• Circulate draft for comments			
• Pre-test interview/questionnaire			
• Revise			
• Pre-test			
• Repeat as often as necessary			
• Final type			
• Make copies and assemble			
Administer the Questionnaire			
• Write introductory letter			
• Recruit and select volunteers			
• Train volunteers			
• Arrange time for interviews			
• Assign jobs to volunteers			
• Mail/deliver questionnaire			
• Interview			
• Follow-up on mail-out			
• Collect completed questionnaires			

Interpret the Survey Results

- Calculate how many people responded to the survey
- Supervise the sorting and cross-sorting of survey answers

See "How to..."
Analyze the Answers
in The Technical Guide

- Compare answers to the same questions from different groups
- Compare results from this survey to other similar surveys

See "How to..."
Interpret the Answers
in The Technical Guide

- Draft the survey results
- Present the draft to the working committee

Well, the survey is complete and the results are in! Ken and Sally presented the findings to the working committee, outlining the significant results, as well as general trends. There were some clear areas for improvement by the rec board but also some feedback that would require further discussion. Sally fielded questions and explained the findings. There were some areas that needed to be further developed. Kris took a copy of the draft to begin work on the final report.

Write the Report

Now that you've completed your survey and have the answers to your questions, you'll want to share them with everyone. A good way to do this is by writing a report of your project - what you did, why you did it and what you found out. The following outline notes the key areas you will want to address in your report.

Introduction

- Who are the members of the survey committee and when was your committee formed?
- What is the background to the problem/issue and why was the survey carried out?
- What were the purpose and objectives of the working committee?
- Who contributed resources to the survey?

Carrying Out the Survey

- What questions was the survey expected to answer?
- What type of survey was used?
- How was the survey pretested? What actions were taken due to the pretest results?
- Who was asked to answer the survey? How many were asked? How many answered? What was the response rate?
- What was the background of the people who answered the questions?
- Were you able to learn anything about the people who were asked to take part in the survey but declined the offer? If so, what did you learn?
- Were there any special problems you had in conducting the survey?

Budget

- Funding and expenses
- Donations in kind
  - services
  - volunteers

Results of the Survey

- What answers were collected for each survey question?
- Can the answers be explained by people's background? Try to explain your results.
- Were any comparisons made between the answers different groups gave for the same questions? If so, what did you learn from the comparisons?
- Were any comparisons made between your survey results and the results of other surveys? If so, what did you learn from the comparisons?

Conclusions
- Which questions were most clearly answered and what were the answers?
- Which questions had no clear answers and what were the most common answers?

Recommendations
- What course of action can be recommended considering the answers received?
- Rank the recommendations relative to the importance of the timing
  - immediate (within one year)
  - short-term (within one to two years)
  - long-term (ongoing or more than three years)

After you've received input from all the members of your working committee, share the draft with other organizations. People like to feel that they have had the opportunity for input to conclusions and recommendations. Their comments and suggestions may be helpful in preparing the final document. It is better to have their input at the draft stage than to have them possibly not accept the recommendations in the final report. Perhaps hold a community meeting with the key agencies and interested people to review the draft and priorize the recommendations.

When Kris completed the draft report, the committee got together to review it. Sally had already shared with Kris and Joy the areas that were re-developed and she now shared them with the committee. In general, there was much satisfaction with the survey results and with the draft report. Some minor editing was required with the draft, including some figure changes in the budget. Joy arranged for a presentation of the final draft to the recreation board for its review and comments, as well as suggestions for recommendation. A public meeting was also scheduled, with invitations extended to the mayor and local agencies and organizations. The recommendations would be developed then.

Follow-up

Follow-up

Now it is time to decide what action you should take as a result of the information you just collected. If nothing happens, the information you gathered was a waste of time and effort. Also, the people in the community could be upset because you asked them what they thought and then ignored their answers.

The local people are involved and interested in the project. Make sure the results are visible.

Report Back

Depending on the relationship your working committee has with the main group, you may want to formally submit your report for its acceptance and adoption by the sponsoring organization.

Share the Information

If you've done your groundwork, the public will be anxiously awaiting the results of your efforts. Tell them!!

- Hold a press conference
- Issue news releases
- Hold workshops and invite the survey participants, interested organizations and the general public
- Prepare a presentation and address town council and local groups
- Send the report to government departments, organizations and agencies
- If the report is long, write a two or three page executive summary that can have a wider distribution
- Have the report and/or summary available at the town office for interested people

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Now that the report was final, complete with recommendations and conclusions, Joy wanted to be sure everyone knew about it. Copies were distributed to all local agencies, organizations and government offices. She talked to the newspaper about having a weekly series in which the results of the report could be shared. The articles would also indicate that executive summaries of the report were available at the rec office and FCSS office.

Create an Action Plan

If you've drawn conclusions or made recommendations, how are you going to ensure they are carried out? One thing you don't want is another report filed on a shelf.

- Bring together the key players and discuss the recommendations
- Identify any time or financial constraints which could apply

Joy knew that to implement some of the recommendations, a plan of action should be drawn up. A public workshop date was set, with the objective to determine actions to implement the recommendations. One recommendation was that there should be more aerobics classes available at different times of the day - noon, after work, evening. An action plan could look like this:

Action	Resources	Responsibility	Measure	Deadline
Ten volunteers from the community to be recruited and trained to teach aerobics classes	*$200 for instructor and advertising*	*Recreation staff to retain instructor and set up training course*	*Successful certification of eight instructors Report to Board*	*Dec. 19*

Everyone in the workshop could brainstorm on the action plans. The community would have a lot of ideas.

- For each recommendation, identify an action plan:[11]
  - What will happen?
  - By when?
  - What resources—money, material, or manpower—are required?
  - Who specifically will carry out the action plan?
- Maintain flexibility of action plan
- Review progress regularly and update
- Plan for a long-term evaluation of the action plan and the process

Evaluate Yourselves

You've done a fine job! But, now that you look back over the whole project, would you do everything the same? Since hindsight is 20-20 vision, you can probably see areas that you would do differently and methods that were not quite as effective as they could have been.

Your last task as a working committee is to review, with a critical eye, the process you've just been through. Without laying blame, try to note what you would change or what could have been improved.

You may want to put copies of all your letters, memos, notices, newspaper clippings and evaluations into a book for future reference. Remember when you got started on your survey and you wished you had somewhere to turn or something to refer to? Don't make the next group reinvent the wheel. Share your information - what worked? what didn't? Store your records in a public place - the library, town office, FCSS office or all of them. Someone will thank you for it in the future.

Show Your Appreciation

Your volunteers have worked long and hard. It's been a tough go, no doubt with many ups and downs. But you've completed a major project that will benefit everyone in your community. How can you show your appreciation to your hardworking committee and volunteers?

- Have a banquet or a wine and cheese social to honor your volunteers
- Present volunteers with a plaque, certificate or a small gift
- Write a nice letter, recognizing their efforts and specific contributions, that could be attached to a resume
- Arrange public recognition such as getting their pictures printed in the newspaper

Pat yourselves on the back. It was a job well done!

Joy knew the volunteers and committee had worked long and hard - far beyond the call of duty. She contacted each of them and asked if they could make a final meeting on Saturday afternoon. Although most weren't pleased with a weekend meeting, they all agreed to attend.

Joy arranged a special appreciation tea hosted by the Royal Purple ladies. As the volunteers arrived, they were greeted by a roomful of local leaders and officials, a decorated hall and plenty of goodies. Joy thanked them and presented each with a small gift, donated by the local jewellers.

The committee had learned a lot during the survey and knew that it had been a worthwhile project. They patted each other on the back—it had been a job well done.

Last Words

Using a community survey can make a tremendous difference to any community. You can plan with confidence, knowing you are well informed about the issues, the concerns and the community. In times when the effective use of material, money and human resources is essential, one of the best ways to ensure you are meeting the needs of the community is to do a *Community Survey.*

Appendices

Appendix A

Project Timelines

Tasks	Calendar Dates Begin	End	Person Responsible
Before You Begin			
Select committee members			
The Plan			
Summarize the issue			
Identify resources			
Review and choose survey approach			
Review existing material			
Maintain public support			
Implementation			
Design the sample			
• Get lists, names			
• Get maps or other documents			
• Draw the sample			
• Assign interviewers			
Design the Questionnaire			
• Collect existing questions			
• Write new questions			
• Edit and order questions			
• Layout and pre-code			
• Circulate draft for comments			
• Pre-test interview/questionnaire			
• Revise			
• Pre-test			
• Repeat as often as necessary			
• Final type			
• Make copies and assemble			
Administer the Questionnaire			
• Write introductory letter			
• Recruit and select volunteers			
• Train volunteers			
• Arrange time for interviews			
• Assign jobs to volunteers			
• Mail/deliver questionnaire			
• Interview			
• Follow-up on mail-out			
• Collect completed questionnaires			

Tasks	Calendar Dates Begin	End	Person Responsible
Interpret the Questionnaire			
• Code			
• Sort and cross-sort			
• Tabulate			
• Draft results			
• Present results to committee			
Prepare report			
• Plan the report			
• Write the draft			
• Prepare graphs and charts			
• Type and edit draft			
• Present draft to key groups			
• Print final report			
Follow-up			
Mail/distribute the report			
Share the information			
Create an action plan			
Evaluate			
Show appreciation			

Appendix B

Resource Agencies

Alberta Bureau of Statistics
7th Floor, 9811 - 109th St.
Edmonton, Alberta
T5K 0C8
427-3058

Alberta Career Development and Employment
Regional Offices

Room 206, 10363 - 108th St.
Edmonton, Alberta
T5J 1L8
422-0046

Bag 900-41
9621 - 96th Ave.
Peace River, Alberta
T8S 1T4
624-6531

Alberta Culture and Multiculturalism
Regional Cultural Consultants

#2501 Provincial Building
10320 - 99th St.
Grande Prairie, Alberta
T8V 6J4
538-5408

#316 Provincial Building
5025 - 49th Ave.
St. Paul, Alberta
T0A 3A0
645-6328

Alberta Economic Development and Trade
Regional Business Development Branch
Regional Offices

Box 2490
111 - 54th St.
Edson, Alberta
T0E 3A0
738-8229

Bag 900-3
10122 - 100th St.
Peace River, Alberta
T8S 1T4
624-6113

#1401 Provincial Building
10320 - 99th St.
Grande Prairie, Alberta
T8V 6J4
538-5230

Box 1688
5025 - 49th Ave.
St. Paul, Alberta
T0A 3A0
645-6358

Alberta Municipal Affairs
Regional Office

Bag 900-30
9621 - 96th Ave.
Peace River, Alberta
T8S 1T4
624-6189

Planning Services Division
9925 - 107th St.
Edmonton, Alberta
T5K 2H9
427-2225

Northern Alberta Development Council

Bag 900-14
#206, 9621 - 96th Ave.
Peace River, Alberta
T8S 1T4
624-6274

Alberta Recreation and Parks

Regional Offices

Box 747
4926 - 1st Ave.
Edson, Alberta
T0E 0P0
723-8227

Box 1454
5025 - 49th Ave.
St. Paul, Alberta
T0A 3A0
645-6353

Box 1078
4917 - 53rd Ave.
High Prairie, Alberta
T0G 1E0

#1701 Provincial Building
10320 - 99th St.
Grande Prairie, Alberta
T8V 6J4
538-5300

Bag 900-11
3rd Floor, 9621 - 96th Ave.
Peace River, Alberta
T8S 1T4
624-6295

Regional Planning Commissions

MacKenzie Regional Planning Commission
Box 450
Berwyn, Alberta
T0E 0E0
338-3862

South Peace Regional Planning Commission
200 Windsor Court
9835 - 101st Ave.
Grande Prairie, Alberta
T8V 0X6
532-0988

Yellowhead Regional Planning Commission
Box 245
Onoway, Alberta
T0E 1V0
967-2249

Statistics Canada

#215, 11010 - 101st St.
Edmonton, Alberta
T5H 4C5
1-800-282-3907

Appendix C

Northern Community Surveys

The following surveys have been completed in northern communities. For more information or a copy of the report, please call the Northern Development Branch or contact the community directly.

Town of Grande Cache Community Needs Assessment Survey; FCSS Board, February 1987.

Purpose—To provide directions for new or existing programs and identify needs that can be addressed in the future.

Hythe and District 1988 Community Survey; FCSS Advisory Board and Harvey Research Ltd., March 1988.

Purpose—To establish new direction for the delivery of service by the Hythe and District FCSS Advisory Board.

Elk Point and District Senior Citizens' Survey; Elk Point Steering Committee, 1987-1988.

Purpose—To identify seniors' needs, identify programs for seniors and assess their adequacy and to make recommendations to help local agencies and services make plans that will let them serve seniors better.

The Valleyview and District Human Needs Survey; McQ Enterprises Ltd., December 1985.

Purpose—To identify and describe the extent of existing and potential social and health care problems affecting particular target groups in the Valleyview area and suggest strategies through which these problems may be addressed by the Human Needs Committee.

Tourism—Lac La Biche Country; Lac La Biche Blueprint for the Future Committee, September 1985.

Purpose—To study the direction and impact of tourism in the Lac La Biche area.

Some Community Impacts of the New Correctional Centre at Grande Cache; The DPA Group Inc., June 1985.

Purpose—To assess the number of inmate families that might be expected to move into the community and their needs so that positive support measures could be put in place.

Beaverlodge Community Survey; Fresh Start Consultants Ltd., June 1985.

Purpose—To identify community needs in order to give direction to town council, to give the community a chance to identify its needs and to provide part of the basis for acquiring funds for development.

Elk Point and District Community Impact Study; Nichols Applied Management, January 1985.

Purpose—To examine community concerns regarding growth and development, to evaluate the potential socio-economic impacts of resource development activities on the community and surrounding area and to formulate recommendations which will minimize negative community impacts on the community and enhance the positive effects of development.

Cold Lake Discussion Paper; Carcajou Research Ltd., November 1984.

Purpose—To determine what should be done at the community level to prepare for and accommodate unforeseen growth in the population.

Human Services in Wabasca/Desmarais; A Review; Bairstow and Associates Consulting Limited, November 1984.

Purpose—To describe and inventory the human service delivery system, to identify service gaps and delivery problems and to develop a community-based strategy to resolve major issues identified.

Fort Chipewyan Tourism Industry: A Plan for Development; Manecon Partnership, March 1984.

Purpose—To research the possibility of strengthening the tourism industry in Fort Chipewyan.

Opportunities for the 80's: A Community Study for Swan Hills; Nichols Applied Management, April 1983.

Purpose—To identify appropriate economic development strategies and implementation of action programs which could strengthen and expand the local economic base.

Terms and Definitions

The following is a select list of terms as defined in the Survey Research Manual produced by Alberta Recreation and Parks. See the bibliography for more detail.

Bias:

A biased question is one that influences people to respond in a way that does not accurately reflect their position on the issue. Some people are aware of the bias and may be affected negatively by it, so they may not answer the question truthfully. Other people may be unaware of the bias and may then be influenced to respond in the direction encouraged by the wording of the question or the gestures of the interviewer.

Closed-ended Questions:

A closed-ended question presents a problem or issue and provides alternative answers from which the respondent can choose the answer that best reflects the respondent's situation. The answers that the respondent can choose from should be mutually exclusive and exhaustive.

Closed-ended questions are quite easy to code. There are many types of closed-ended questions.

1. Multiple choice: Several choices of answers are listed. The respondents record their answers by placing a check mark or number in the appropriate blank, or by circling the correct words.
2. Checklists: Checklists are used when more than one answer may be correct. Checklists indicate the presence or absence of something.
3. Ranking: The respondents must arrange all the given answers in order according to some specified level.

Codebook:

A codebook is a document that describes the location of items from the questionnaire in the survey data file and the specific labels that make up those items. A codebook acts as a guide for coders as they prepare questionnaire responses for coding and for locating items in data files during the analysis.

Coding:

Coding is used to assign numbers to identify responses and response categories to make the task of tabulation easier. Coding may be done manually on paper for hand tabulation or prepared for computer analysis by keypunching the codes onto cards or typing the codes into a computer terminal to transfer onto a magnetic tape.

Confidence Level:
The practitioners can express the accuracy of the sample statistics in terms of their level of confidence that the statistics will fall within a specified interval. For example, '95% confidence' is often used.

Confidentiality and Anonymity:
An anonymous study is one in which nobody (not even the practitioner) can connect returned questionnaires to the names of those completing them. A study is confidential when the practitioner knows who has responded to each questionnaire and yet promises not to reveal this information to other people.

Cover Letter:
Cover letters should be short and to the point and accompany any survey sent through the mail or hand-delivered. The cover letter should include: the purpose, objectives and rationale of the study; a description of how the persons were selected; a statement of the level of confidentiality and/or anonymity; an introduction of the researcher; identification of the sponsoring organization; deadline date; instructions for returning the questionnaire if necessary; and a 'thank you' to the respondent.

Cross-tabulation:
Cross-tabulations are used to examine the number of cases that occur jointly in two or more categories by integrating the responses of two or more questions. Cross-tabulations explain rather than describe data.

Exhaustive:
The practitioner should try to include all possible answers to a question. If a practitioner feels he has left out some possible answers, he should include a 'don't know' or 'other, please specify' category, so that every respondent can answer.

Filtering Questions:
Filtering questions are those which direct some but not all respondents to skip one or more questions on the answer they provide. Special instructions are required for filtering questions.

Follow-up Letters:
Follow-up postcards or letters constitute one of the best methods for increasing the response rate. Generally, two follow-ups are planned for a mail-out questionnaire. The first follow-up usually follows the questionnaire in two or three weeks. The first follow-up is a letter that encourages those people who have not responded

to do so and thanks those who have responded. The second follow-up should also include another questionnaire. Both follow-up letters should include basically the same material as the cover letter.

Leading Questions:
Leading questions are those that are worded in a way that strongly influences the respondents to give a certain answer. They lead the respondents to a particular reply. Leading questions do not elicit accurate answers.

Literature Review:
A review of the literature on the specific research topic should be completed to determine what information is available and what information is not available. A literature review can aid the practitioner on previous methods of data collection and areas that have or have not been researched. Sources of information are libraries, agencies and statistics.

Loaded Words:
Loaded words are those which spark immediate positive or negative feelings in the respondents. The danger is that the respondents will react more to the words than to the question.

Mutually Exclusive:
The categories in a question should be clear and not overlap. In some cases, questions are worded in a way that requires respondents to give more than one answers when only one is required.

Open-ended Questions:
Open-ended questions allow the respondents to answer with their own words. Open-ended questions are best used in the exploratory or design stages or when studying complex issues such as attitudes and opinions. Open-ended questions do, however, present problems when it is time to code.

Pre-tests:
In pre-testing, the practitioner sends the questionnaire to a sample of people as similar as possible to the people who will be receiving the actual questionnaire. The practitioner also sends copies to other people, such as experts in the research field.

Random Sampling:
A random sample is defined as a sample which has been selected from the population by a process which assures that each possible sample of a given size has an equal chance or being selected, and that all the members of the population have an equal chance of being selected into the sample.

Respondents:
Respondents are those who volunteer their time to cooperate with the practitioner by providing information about themselves or knowledge about certain issues. The practitioner's search for information should never harm the respondents in any way.

Response Rate:
To have the most representative survey, the response rate should be 100%. However, the response rate is often much lower. When the questionnaire is dropped off and picked up, if the response rate is between 30 and 40%, it is considered to be good. Unless a high response rate is obtained, the study results cannot be assumed to be representative.

Sample:
A sample is a subset of the population. In an experiment, for economical reasons, the practitioner usually collects data on a smaller group of subjects than the entire population. The smaller group is called the sample.

Surveys:
Surveys are useful for examining things that are not observable, such as opinions and attitudes, as well as for obtaining descriptive information about the respondents. There are four types of surveys that practitioners can use in their studies:

1. Face-to-Face Interview: A face-to-face interview involves a meeting between a respondent and interviewer who records answers to the survey questions.
2. Telephone Interview: In a telephone interview, the respondent is reached by telephone and the interviewer records the answers to the questions.
3. Self-Administered Questionnaires: In a self-administered questionnaire, the respondent is responsible for understanding the instructions and questions and recording his answers.
4. Public Meeting: Public meetings are open to all those affected by the issue under study. It is an opportunity to both give and receive information, to discuss issues and to reach an agreement. This is an informal method of gathering information and can only be analyzed by recording and examining the content of the discussions.

Tables:
Tables cross-classify two variables into rows and columns. A reader should be able to understand a table without referring to the text. Tables must have complete titles and headings to aid the reader in understanding what the tables mean.

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Footnotes

1. Abbey-Livingston, Diane, and Abbey, David S. **Enjoying Research - A "How-To" Manual on Needs Assessment** (Recreation Branch, Ontario Ministry of Tourism and Recreation, Toronto, 1982), pp. 4-5.
2. Ibid., pp. 1-3.
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4. **Yes, You Can! Master Plan - Vol. 3: Community Participation** (Alberta Recreation and Parks), p. 3.
5. Ibid., pp. 5-6.
6. Adapted from **Survey Research Manual** (Alberta Recreation and Parks, October 1984), p. 86.
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8. **Needs Assessment Handbook: A Close-up Look,** Volume 1, Alberta Culture Library Services Branch. September 1985.
9. Borland-Hart and Schleicher, p. 21.
10. Adapted from Abbey-Livingston and Abbey, pp. 89-99.
11. **Needs Assessment Handbook: A Close-up Look,** p. 27.